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ABSTRACT

This study explored teachers' attitudes toward students with learning handicaps mainstreamed into their classrooms. A sample of 44 fourth- through sixth-grade teachers completed attitude questionnaires about selected students with and without learning handicaps in their classrooms, personal data forms about themselves, and behavior profiles for each student selected from their classrooms. Teachers were more rejecting toward students with learning handicaps as compared to non-learning handicapped students, but they reported attitudes of concern for their mainstreamed students significantly more often than attitudes of rejection. Teachers' successes with students were significantly correlated with positive teacher attitudes. Since teachers' general attitudes toward mainstreaming did not relate to teachers' specific attitudes toward actual students, teacher training should not necessarily focus on changing teachers' attitudes toward mainstreaming. (Contains 34 references.) (Author)

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Regular Education Teachers' Attitudes Toward Their Mainstreamed Students

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Abstract

This investigator explored teachers' attitudes toward students with learning handicaps mainstreamed into their classrooms. A sample of forty-four fourth through sixth grade teachers completed attitude questionnaires about selected students with and without learning handicaps in their classrooms, personal data forms about themselves, and behavior profiles for each student selected from their classrooms. Teachers were more rejecting toward students with learning handicaps as compared to non learning handicapped students, but they reported attitudes of concern for their mainstreamed students significantly more often than attitudes of rejection. Teachers' successes with students were significantly correlated with positive teachers' attitudes. Since teachers' general attitudes toward mainstreaming did not relate to teachers' specific attitudes toward actual students, teacher training should not necessarily focus on changing teachers' attitudes toward mainstreaming.

Regular Education Teachers' Attitudes Toward Their Mainstreamed Students

Researchers have identified teacher attitudes as a major concern in exploring teacher effects upon mainstreamed students with learning handicaps (SLH). According to Hudson, Reisberg, and Wolf (1983), mainstreaming may be defeated if teachers do not hold positive attitudes toward this practice. Since mainstreaming SLH is now commonly implemented, research is needed to examine these effects. Repeated findings have documented that regular teachers harbor negative attitudes toward students with handicaps in the mainstream (Blazovic, 1972; Childs, 1979; Horne, 1983; Parish, Eads, Reese, & Piscitello 1977; Vacc & Kirst, 1977). These studies used vignettes or general questions rather than actual mainstreamed SLH when investigating teachers' attitudes. There are problems with current research of teacher attitudes toward mainstreamed students (Jones, 1984). The researchers assumed that teachers with negative attitudes toward mainstreaming would reject students with handicaps. Not only may this be a faulty assumption, but these general questions do not explore teachers attitudes toward their real students with learning handicaps.

An often cited study by Silberman (1971) examined teacher attitudes and behaviors toward regular education students. Four specific attitudes were identified by Silberman (1969) to investigate the teacher attitude-behavior relationship: attachment, concern, indifference, and rejection. Attachment was defined as a teacher's affectionate tie to a student, derived from the pleasure the student brings to

the teacher's work. Concern refers to a teacher's sympathy and support for a student's academic and/or emotional problems. Indifference describes a teacher's lack of involvement with a student because he or she fails to excite or dismay the teacher. Rejection is when a teacher refuses to consider the student as a worthy recipient of the teacher's professional energies (Silberman,1969).

Silberman conducted his study using attitude questions that focused on teachers' current students. Multiple measures of behaviors were examined and compared with a teacher's attitude toward a specific student. The attitude questions developed by Silberman have correlated with certain teacher behaviors and teacher-student interaction patterns. Each of the four categories relates to a different teacher behavior pattern; these results were replicated in several studies (Evertson, Brophy and Good, 1972; 1973; Jenkins, 1972). Silberman and his followers have established the attitude-behavior relationship, but their results have not yet been applied to the question of regular education teachers' attitudes toward mainstreamed SLH. The purpose of this research was to evaluate teachers' attitudes toward students with learning handicaps mainstramed into their classrooms.

Methods

The study assessed teachers' attitudes toward the SLH and their non handicapped students in their classrooms. The subjects, procedures, instruments, hypotheses and analyses are described in the following section.

Subjects

Fourth, fifth, and sixth grade teachers (n=44) who taught at the elementary schools in two districts participated in the study. All the consenting teachers with mainstreamed SLH in their classrooms were included in the study; only five of the available teachers declined to participate in the study. The districts were similar in the educational background of the teachers and the percentage of teachers who taught fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. The average class size was around 30 for both school districts. District 1 had fewer male teachers than District 2. District 1 also had more White teachers than Black, while District 2 had equal proportions of White to Black teachers. The breakdown of the subjects' gender, race, education, grade level, class size and teaching experience in the study is presented in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Procedures

First, each teacher's class had a sample group of SLH and their non handicapped peers chosen from the total class roster. The selection was completed by the investigator for each class before the surveys were given to the participating teachers. The sample included all mainstreamed SLH and a comparison group of non handicapped students. The number of non handicapped students in the sample was the number of SLH in the class plus two. This formula was devised to provide enough non handicapped students into the sample to be representative of the teacher's entire class. The formula also provided enough students so that it was not

apparent that SLH were the focus of the study, but not so many that the teachers could not fill out surveys in a timely way.

Students selected for the non learning handicapped control group were chosen as representatives of class demographics. The variables that were controlled were: gender, race, and student achievement. The non handicapped students were selected by their characteristics as representative students in the areas of gender, ethnicity, and grades for each class. All non handicapped student samples included male and female, high, average, and low achieving students, and representation of the major ethnic groups found in the particular classroom.

The teachers were told that this was a study of teachers' perceptions. They were not informed that their attitudes toward the mainstreamed SLH in their classrooms was the focus of the study. The teachers were asked to complete a Teacher Information Form and Teacher Attitude Surveys.

Teacher Information Form. Teachers were asked about the factors that were determined to have a significant effect on teacher attitudes toward mainstreamed students. These included the teachers' special education training, general attitude toward mainstreaming, prior experience with mainstreamed SLH and prior success with mainstreamed SLH.

Teacher Attitude Survey. Teachers' attitudes were assessed with four questions that addressed attitudes of acceptance, indifference, concern, and rejection toward each student in the sample (adapted from Silberman, 1969); the ratings were on a 6 point Likert-type scale:

1. Attachment: If you could choose a child to stay in your classroom another year for the sheer joy of it, is it likely you would choose this child?

Not likely 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very likely

2. Indifference: If this child's parent or guardian dropped in unannounced for a conference, how much would you have to say about this child?

Little to say 1 2 3 4 5 6 A lot to say

3. Concern: If you could devote all your attention to a child who concerns you a great deal, is it likely you would choose this child?

Not likely 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very likely

4. Rejection: If your class size was reduced by a child, how relieved would you be if this child was transferred?

Not relieved 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very relieved

Hypotheses

The purpose of this study was to evaluate teacher's attitudes toward mainstreamed students with learning handicaps. Comparisons of attitudes toward SLH and their peers were completed. The following hypotheses guided the design and analyses:

1. Regular education teachers will rate SLH significantly higher for rejection than their non handicapped peers.

2. Regular education teachers will rate SLH significantly higher for rejection than for attitudes of attachment, indifference, and concern.

3. Regular education teachers discrepancy ratings for rejection will correlate negatively with the following factors:

-- teacher's general attitude toward mainstreaming

-- teacher's years of special education training

-- teacher's prior success with SLH

Results

Preliminary analyses were completed to determine if there were significant differences in attitude ratings between the two districts in the study or teachers who taught grades fourth, fifth, or sixth. No significant differences were discovered. There were no significant differences between teachers who were male/female, of different ethnic backgrounds, had bachelors or masters degrees, had varying class sizes, or had differing numbers of SLH in their classroom (1-5 students). Thus, the data were analyzed for a group as a whole to form a total sample of 44 regular education teachers.

Teachers' Attitudes

Means and standard deviations for teachers' attitudes are presented in Table 2; the analysis of variance summary table is presented in Table 3. Follow-up analyses of significant main effects for attitude and attitude by handicap interactions were completed. Overall, lower ratings were provided for rejection and indifference items; however, these main effects were involved in the attitude by handicap interaction. Teachers rated their SLH significantly higher on the rejection item (mean = 2.76, SD = 1.43) than their non handicapped peers (mean = 1.95, SD = .80). Other significant differences were found for the attachment and concern

items. Teachers reported significantly higher attachment for their non handicapped students (mean = 4.08, SD = 1.20) than their students with learning handicaps (mean = 3.02, SD = 1.59). Conversely, the teachers gave higher concern ratings to their SLH (mean = 4.47, SD = 1.30) than their non handicapped counterparts (mean = 3.20, SD = 1.07). There were no significant differences for teachers' scores for indifference where the means were: SLH = 2.15, SD = 1.09; Non handicapped students = 2.20, SD = 1.02.

Insert Table 2 and 3 about here

It had been predicted that SLH would be rated higher for rejection than for the attitudes of attachment, concern, and indifference. Teachers actually rated their SLH significantly highest for concern. The next highest scores the teachers gave their SLH were for attachment and rejection (not significantly different from each other). The lowest ratings for the SLH were for indifference which was not found to be significantly different from the rejection score. These findings are illustrated by Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Teacher Factors

Three teachers' factors were examined to see if they were related to teachers' attitudes of rejection for SLH versus their non handicapped students. Rejection

discrepancy scores were determined for each teacher (SLH rejection score minus non handicapped student rejection score) then compared to the teachers' factors using simultaneous multiple regression. The teachers' factors were:

- teachers' general attitude toward mainstreaming
- teachers' years of special education training
- teachers' prior success with SLH.

None of these factors was found to be significantly related to the discrepancy scores of the teachers ($R^2 = 0.12$, $R^2 = 0.02$, F value = 1.21, prob > F = 0.33). No step-wise multiple regression was completed since there was not a significant relationship. Since no relationship was found between the rejection discrepancy and the teachers' factors of special education training, general attitude toward mainstreaming, mainstreaming experience, and mainstreaming success, correlations were computed to determine if there was a relationship between the teachers' attitudes toward their SLH for attachment, indifference, concern and rejection averages and these teachers' factors. Only one value was significant; the relationship between indifference and mainstreaming attitude. (Table 4).

Insert Table 4 about here

Several student characteristics were analyzed to evaluate relations with teachers' attitudes. The students' characteristics were student gender, student ethnicity, and student achievement level as a measure of teachers' perception. Teachers rated boys significantly higher for rejection. There were no significant differences found

for teachers' attitudes toward students from different ethnic groups. Students who were high achievers were rated significantly higher for attachment and significantly lower for concern and rejection. Students who were low achievers were rated significantly higher for concern and for rejection.

Correlational analysis also showed that there was a significant, moderate, positive relationship between attachment and perceived success (.46) and a significant, moderate, negative relationship between rejection and perceived success (-.41). Concern showed a significant, low, negative correlation (-.17).

Discussion

Researchers who have indicated that teachers hold negative attitudes toward mainstreaming SLH often assumed these attitudes would lead to rejection of these students if mainstreaming were to take place. In this study, although teachers held some negative views toward the mainstreamed SLH in their classrooms, rejecting attitudes toward specific students were not the major attitudes held by teachers toward these students, and they were not related to the teachers' general attitudes toward mainstreaming. But, teachers' rejecting attitude was related to teachers' success with these students.

Teachers reported more rejecting attitudes toward their students who received special education services than toward their non handicapped students, as has been documented by previous research studies. However, teachers were overwhelmingly concerned for their students with learning handicaps. None of the previous studies asked teachers about their attitudes of concern for students with handicaps. The general questions devised by researchers such as Childs (1979), Parish et al.

(1979), and Leary (1957) forced teachers to choose pro or con regarding mainstreaming, and did not take into account other kinds of attitudes that teachers may have held. The regular education teachers' apparent concern offers hope that they would not mind working with special needs students if they had the skills, competence, knowledge and support to do so successfully.

One of the more striking results of this study was the finding of no relationship between teachers' general attitudes toward mainstreaming SLH and their attitudes toward the mainstreamed SLH in their classrooms. This result gives reason to question some of the interpretations made by previous researchers who have explored teachers' attitudes toward students with handicaps. (Blazovic, 1972; Childs, 1979; Conine, 1969; DeLeo, 1976; Garvar-Pinhas & Schmelkin, 1989; Horne, 1983; Moore & Fine, 1978; Parish et al., 1977; Sigler & Lazar, 1976; Skrtic, Sigler & Lazar, 1975; Vacc & Kirst, 1977). Based on this research, many teacher trainers have placed great emphasis on changing regular teachers' attitudes toward mainstreaming students with handicaps(Donaldson, 1980; Gallagher, 1985; Harper-Barach, Cronin, Corwin & Meder, 1990; Hudson, Reisberg & Wolf, 1983; Shechtman, 1989; Smelkin & Lieberman, 1984). Ryor (1977), ex-president of the National Education Association, stated that the intent of PL 94-142 would be destroyed if teachers did not have positive attitudes toward mainstreaming students with handicaps. The results from this study suggest that changing teachers' general attitudes may not necessarily change teachers' behaviors or their ability to cope with mainstreamed students.

Teachers were also less rejecting of students they experienced success teaching. It is probable that teachers would want a child removed from their class who they believe would be more successful in another setting. Teachers' lack of success with students with handicaps may be one reason why teachers would be relieved to have them removed from their classrooms. If one asked teachers if they were supportive of any extra duty or time-consuming activity, the majority would respond negatively - not because they are prejudiced to the issue, but because they believed they could not handle one more task. Teachers have viewed mainstreaming as a another responsibility and may have been concerned about their abilities to successfully work with exceptional children. They were not necessarily rejecting; rather, they were concerned about not meeting students' needs. If teachers were given the skills, and support, to be successful with students with learning handicaps, then their attitudes would be more positive toward mainstreaming these students.

A reason these results may differ from previous studies could be due to students' characteristics other than learning handicaps, such as race, achievement, and gender. This study controlled for these variables by matching the students from participating teachers' classes on race, gender, and achievement. However, student characteristics of gender and achievement were also related to teachers' attitudes. Asking teachers for their attitudes toward real students involves teachers' considerations of many other variables besides the students' handicapping label. This methodology was employed so that the multitude of variables that do affect

teachers' attitudes would be included, as opposed to hypothetical vignettes and forced choice questions which only look at the effects of labels upon teachers' attitudes.

Contrary to studies which measured teachers' general attitudes toward mainstreaming (Larrivee, 1982; Mandell & Strain, 1978; Mark, 1980; Williams, 1977), teachers' attitudes toward specific students were not related to the teachers' special education training, special education experience, or previous success with SLH. When investigating special education training of teachers, there was not enough variation to ascertain whether or not training has a significant effect. Other studies have found significant relationships between general attitudes towards mainstreaming and special education coursework (Ammer, 1984; Hanrahan & Rapagna, 1987; Jordan & Proctor, 1969; Mandell & Strain, 1978; Panda & Bartel, 1972; Peters, 1977; Stephens & Braun, 1980; Williams, 1977).

Despite the robustness of the findings there are limitations to this study. One weakness was the problem of socially acceptable answers. It is more socially appropriate, or "politically correct," for teachers to express support and concern rather than rejection for students with handicaps. This has also been a problem with previous research into teachers' attitudes. The methodology employed for this study is an effective model for exploring teachers' attitudes toward students. Although asking teachers about real students is more time-consuming for a researcher than using vignettes or general questions, a more accurate assessment of teachers' attitudes is acquired. The results of this study are an important addition to our understanding about mainstreaming students with learning handicaps. If

teachers' general attitudes toward mainstreaming do not determine their specific attitudes toward SLH, then it is unlikely they are the major contributors to mainstreaming success or failure.

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Table 1

Subject Characteristics

		District 1 n = 18 n/%	District 2 n = 26 n/%	Total N = 44 n/%
GENDER	Male	3/17	7/26	10/23
	Female	15/83	19/73	34/77
RACE	Black	2/11	12/46	14/32
	White	15/83	12/46	27/61
	Hispanic	0	1/4	1/2
	Asian	1/6	1/4	2/5
EDUCATION	BA/BS	14/78	19/73	33/75
	MA/MS	4/22	7/27	11/25
GRADE	4th	6/33	9/35	15/34
	5th	5.5/30	9/35	14.5/33
	6th	6.5/37	8/30	14.5/33
CLASS SIZE	Av. size	30.1	30.5	30.3
	Range	26-33	26-33	26-33
EXPERIENCE	Av. years	12.5	7.6	9.6
	Range	3-33	1-29	1-31

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Teachers' Attitudes Toward Students with Learning Handicaps and Students without Learning Handicaps

	Students with LH	Students without LH
Attachment*	X= 3.02	X= 4.08
	SD= 1.59	SD= 1.20
Indifference	X= 2.15	X= 2.20
	SD= 1.09	SD= 1.02
Concern*	X= 4.47	X= 3.20
	SD= 1.30	SD= 1.07
Rejection*	X= 2.76	X= 1.95
	SD= 1.43	SD= 0.80

N = 44
*p< .05 for differences between groups

Table 3

ANOVA Summary Table

Source	MS	df	F	p
Handicap	5.04	1	3.25	.0723
Attitude	61.58	3	39.72	.0001*
Hand x Att	23.20	3	14.96	.0001*
Error	1.55	301		

*p< .05

Table 4

Pearson Correlation Coefficients for Attitudes and Teacher Factors

	Spec. Ed. Training	MS Attitude	MS Exper.	MS Success
SLH Attachment	-0.147	0.174	0.191	0.043
SLH Indifference	0.079	0.319*	0.020	0.223
SLH Concern	0.219	0.236	0.079	0.264
SLH Rejection	0.085	0.155	-0.053	-0.031

Means and Standard Deviations of Teacher Factors

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Spec. Ed. Training	0.84 credit hours	1.80
MS Attitude	4.14	1.23
MS Exper.	4.09	1.44
MS Success	3.71	1.23

N = 44 *p < .05

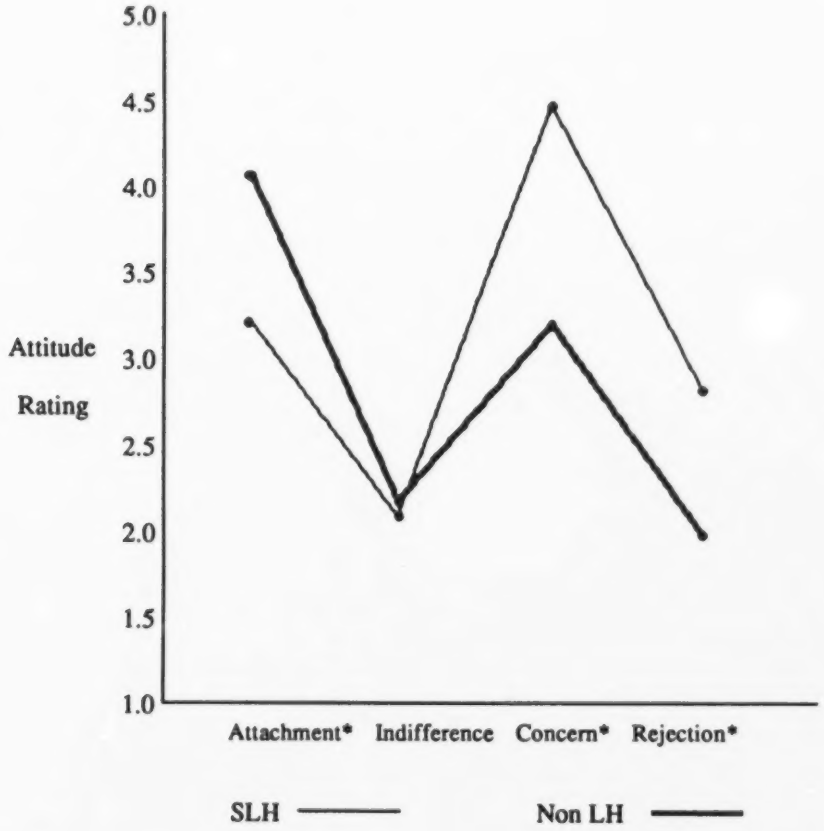

Figure 1. Teachers' attitude ratings for students with learning handicaps (SLH) versus non learning handicapped students (Non LH).